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ABSTRACT

A study examined a number of sources regarding a growing trend against the importance of academic publishing, including various articles that have appeared in the popular and academic press both for and against the "publish or perish" mentality. The literature review was grounded in E. Boyer's 1990 report "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate" and was limited to articles published in the last decade. Examination clearly showed that (1) the majority (68%) of faculty in America agree that there are better ways to evaluate faculty; (2) teaching is widely regarded as being more important than research; and (3) there was an overwhelming majority of college and university administrators who thought that it would be a good idea to view scholarship as not just research. Findings suggest that the popular press agrees with these views. In some states, legislatures have actually passed laws requiring that public university professors spend more time teaching, although the ways to effect this change have not been clarified. The fact is that academia is slow and difficult to change. Findings also suggest that views in the academic press are largely just as negative as those found in the popular press. Results did not clearly reflect how, or even whether, theatre practitioners responded to the question of changes in the "publish or perish" system. Through intense scrutiny of the current system, perhaps theatre departments can suggest alternatives that will more properly apply to the field. (Contains 23 references and a sample survey.) (CR)

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James M. Brandon

"Publish or Perish" in Academia: On Its Way Out?

A Study Examining Recent Popular and Academic Trends Concerning the Issue, With a Focus on Possible Effects For Theatre Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

> Published research emerges as the common currency of academic achievement, a currency that can be weighed and evaluated across institutional and even national boundaries. (Bok 77)

Derek Bok, President of Harvard University, wrote these words in 1986. His sentiments echo a long line of academic thought, began in America with John Hopkins University and based on the German university system, that selected research as the most important endeavor for academia. Research, and its publication, is one of the primary methods by which professors are evaluated for promotion. Some would argue that too much weight has been placed on this facet of academic life. Recent articles in both the popular and academic press have attacked the "publish or perish" mentality on a number of levels.

Are these articles part of a growing trend against the importance of academic publishing? I will attempt to answer that question through this study. I will explore a number of sources, beginning with Ernest Boyer's 1990 report for The Carnegie Foundation For The Advancement Of Teaching entitled Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities Of The Professoriate _. This very influential report contains a plethora of surveys that seem to suggest a trend away from the predominance of research. I will then examine various arguments that have been presented in the popular and academic press both for and against the "publish or perish" mentality. I will limit my survey of this literature to articles published in the last decade. Finally, I will discuss specific impacts

that these arguments may have for theatre pedagogy. In this final section I will also include a sample survey, based on Boyer's 1990 model, which I intend to send to every theatre professor teaching at the college level in the United States. This mailing will occur when the proper funding has been secured. If funding is limited, I may limit my search by region (midwest) or even by state (Ohio).

BOYER'S REPORT

Dr. Ernest Boyer's 1990 report has been very influential in certain academic circles. One of his major arguments is against the "restricted view of scholarship" that currently exists in academia (Boyer 15). In his study he urges academia to move beyond its narrow definition of scholarship. He writes:

> . . . the time has come to move beyond the tired old "teaching versus research" debate and give the familiar and honorable term "scholarship" a broader, more capricious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. (Boyer 16)

Boyer then goes on to list his ideas as to how to achieve this lofty goal. Boyer's ideas essentially call for a change in the definition of scholarship.

Boyer's call for change in academia is one that would disrupt the old axiom of "publish or perish." If there is a trend against the "publish or perish" mentality, then Boyer's article may stand as the best expression of this trend. Certainly it is an expression that many have responded to. Evidence of this can be found in the "Bowling Green State University Functional Mission Statement," which was prepared for the Ohio Board of Regents in October of 1995. It reads:

> One of America's most respected and gifted educational thinkers, Dr. Ernest Boyer. . . has urged that the definition of research should properly be expanded to broader consideration of the scholarship of teaching/learning and of application, as well as research *per se*. **Dr. Boyer's model is one which Bowling Green State University, like its peers throughout the nation, will increasingly accept and incorporate into its institutional practices in the years ahead.** ("Mission Statement" 3 **Emphasis Mine**)

If there is a trend away from "publish and perish," it may be achieving momentum because of Boyer's detailed study.

The most valuable portion of the Boyer study can be found in the numerous national survey results of university faculty, conducted by the Carnegie Foundation, that he has included. One of the surveys shows that 75% of all respondents disagreed with the statement: "multi disciplinary work is soft and should not be considered scholarship" (Boyer 20). Clearly this shows that a majority of professors are willing to consider something other than research and publication in a single specialized field as real scholarship.

Faculty also tend to view teaching as an important endeavor that should be considered during the promotion process. In a survey asking respondents whether or not they agreed with this statement, "teaching effectiveness should be the primary criterion for promotion of faculty," 62% agreed (Boyer 32). Perhaps most important, among respondents from research oriented institutions, 21% agreed with the statement (Boyer 32). So in addition to a general recognition of teaching as an important function among all types of universities, there is also a significant segment among

research institutions which are calling for greater recognition of teaching aptitude.

Perhaps the most damning survey for the "publish or perish" system is the one in which faculty were asked whether or not they agreed with the following statement: "at my institution we need better ways, besides publications, to evaluate the scholarly performance of the faculty" (Boyer 34). The results showed that 68% of the respondents agreed with this statement. This 68% translated into a majority at every type of institution surveyed: research, doctorate-granting, comprehensive, liberal arts and two-year. These results clearly show that the majority of faculty in America agree that there are better ways to evaluate faculty. "Publish or perish" may, indeed, be on its way out.

This is reinforced by another survey question that asked :"do your interests lie primarily in research or in teaching?" (Boyer 44). Almost two-thirds of those polled, 70% of respondents, answered that teaching was where their primary interest was focused. This included 33% of respondents from research oriented institutions (Boyer 44). These results show that, among faculty, teaching is widely regarded as being more important than research. Yet this preference is largely ignored by the "publish or perish" mentality that currently rules academia.

Perhaps most interesting is a study which Boyer cites that was taken by Richard I. Miller of Ohio University. In a survey of academic deans and vice-presidents at more than eight hundred colleges and universities that asked if administrators thought that it would be a good idea to view scholarship as more than research,

the results were "overwhelmingly supportive of this proposition" (Boyer 16). This result is most significant in that it shows a willingness among key members of various administrations to support the idea of viewing scholarship as more than just research, and all the "publish or perish" mentality that goes with it.

As Boyer's ideas are debated and incorporated into university promotion and tenure considerations, it is possible that the "publish or perish" system may be on it way out. It is important to note that Boyer is not calling for the abolishment of research and publication; rather, Boyer is seeking to redefine "scholarship," with more weight being given to other worthwhile endeavors. If there is a trend against the current "publish or perish" mentality that pervades academia, then it may have its most prolific spokesman in Dr. Ernest Boyer.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

The Popular Press: Laurel Shaper Walters' 27 February 1995 article for The Christian Science Monitor _ offers an indictment of "publish or perish," as well as problems inherent in attempting to change the system. She begins by alluding to a recent law, passed by the Ohio legislature, which requires "a 10-percent increase in teaching at the state's 13 public universities" (Walters 13). She seems to have hit on a trend occurring in numerous state legislatures as they ponder the future of their universities. She writes:

> At least 12 state legislatures have mandated studies of faculty workload at public institutions in the past several years. . . Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Washington, and West Virginia have passed laws that

> public university professors spend more time teaching. Lawmakers in Wisconsin, Georgia, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Colorado are considering such measures this year. . . In Maryland, the legislature has threatened to withhold more than $21 million in state-college funds until higher education officials show a renewed concentration on teaching. (13)

Some in academia see this as a result of pressure from the public. Walters cites University of Cincinnati professor Barbara Walvoord, who writes:

> The public is increasingly insisting on exercising accountability over higher education. They're not willing to buy as large amounts of research as they've bought in the past. They want more teaching, and they want more attention to the quality of undergraduate teaching. (13)

But Walvoord also goes on to examine some problems in changing the system. For example, in relation to the Ohio law, what constitutes a 10% increase? Teaching more students? Spending more time with current students? Increased prep-time for classes? The law doesn't specify.

The main problem with the proposed changes is the relatively slow rate that academia changes. This is better understood as Walters examines how the system became the way it is. She quotes Gene Maeroff, a Fellow at the Carnegie Foundation, who writes:

> As higher education expanded, the research university model was simply emulated by all kinds of institutions. You've got a whole structure that is predicated on the assumption that everyone is going to do research. But everyone is not a researcher, so the system is distorted. (13)

And this distorted system is exceedingly difficult to change. Walvoord writes, "It's very difficult for universities that have spent

decades building up the capacity to do top-notch research in the nation's interest to stop doing that" (Walters 13). The difficulty in changing the present system is perhaps best expressed with Maeroff's comment that while University officials have talked about rewarding teaching, as well as research, for years, ". . . if you look at the actual practices, I don't think they've changed markedly" (Walters 13).

So Walters' article highlights recent trends in state legislatures concerning the "publish or perish" system , and also examines the problems in changing the system. Her arguments for the "publish or perish" system are essentially limited to remarks as to why the change has not happened yet. Nowhere in her article is it suggested that the current system should remain the way it is.

Jonathan Yardley's 6 March 1989 article for The Washington Post , "The 'Original' Sin: Publish, and Perish the Thought," comes out strongly against the academic environment which fosters the "publish or perish" sentiment. He begins by criticizing an "Anne Tyler Symposium" which was scheduled for later that year in Baltimore. He writes of this event:

> . . . what the Tyler symposium and all such gatherings are truly about is not the study of literature, or anything else, but the pursuit of academic careers; and it is upon papers such as those to be presented in Baltimore that these careers are built. (2)

Yardley feels that this practice has hurt other functions of academia, while not furthering humanity's knowledge one iota. He writes:

> All of this takes place within a culture in which research, however mindless or irrelevant, is given pride of place ahead of what outsiders assume to be higher education's primary obligation, teaching. (2)

So Yardley clearly sees "publish or perish" as a detriment to quality teaching. His article also contains some thoughts on Charles J. Sykes' book, ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education , which will be discussed later in this study. Yardley is clearly against "publish or perish" system because it leads to inconsequential publications and shifts emphasis away from teaching.

A disturbing trend in the research community is used by a number of authors to take aim at the "publish or perish" system. This trend is that of academic dishonesty. Numerous authors cite the system as fostering a need to produce, by whatever means necessary. John Leo writes in 12 Dec. 1988 issue of US News and World Report _ about Harvard University's Shevert Frazier, who was exposed for plagiarizing information that he found in Scientific American and printing it in Orthopedic Clinics of North America _. He writes:

> . . . the [publish or perish] system helps breed cynicism about the purposes of academic life. For all we know, Shervert Frazier might have thought, "If nobody is going to read this stuff, why should I give it my best shot?" If so, the best response to Frazier's disgrace would be to put a few thousand academic journals to sleep in his name. (90)

The problems of academic plagiarism do not end with this case. Barry Came, writing for the 20 June 1994 issue of Maclean's, shows that the problem extends beyond our northern border and into

Canada. In this case, with an engineering professor accused of plagiarism who shot and killed four of his fellow professors. Again, the "publish or perish" system is blamed for the academic dishonesty.

Daniel Greenberg, writing for the 8 June 1987 issue of US News and World Report _, lists a long line of scientific results that were made-up expressly for the purpose of being published in academic journals. His article also takes aim at the "publish or perish" system, with its financial rewards, as the primary culprit. The dishonesty is seen merely as a symptom of a far larger disease which no one is attempting to cure.

An editorial in the 20 Feb. 1991 edition of the Los Angeles Times explores the alleged plagiarism of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bruno Bettelheim. It also takes aim at the "publish or perish" system, and reads:

> In recent decades, too many universities admitted into graduate programs far more students than the academic job market justified, producing an almost Darwinian race for survival by dissertation and publication. (6)

Plagiarism is again looked at as a symptom of a larger disease.

Thomas Sowell, an economist and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, is an outspoken critic of the "publish or perish" system. In a 13 February 1995 article for Forbes, entitled "Just Words," Sowell laments that most modern research is the "worst drivel in academia," which he feels is the result of "enormous pressures to produce" under the current system (109). In a 19 June 1995 article for Forbes entitled "Good Teachers Need Not Apply," Sowell discusses how "many in academia regard teaching awards as the kiss

of death," because attention to teaching takes away time and energy from research (67). Sowell argues that the only way the system will change is if the money that universities receive for research is taken away (67). Other than that, Sowell feels that the current system means that excellent teachers who gain cash awards as a result of excellent teaching should refer to it as "travel money," since they won't get tenure for good teaching (67).

Clearly the popular press offers few reasons why the "publish or perish" system should be allowed to exist in academia. The trend in popular literature from the past decade is clearly in favor of reformation of the current academic system. Various reasons are offered in numerous articles for the dismantling of "publish or perish," and academia is largely viewed as one huge idiot, which talks to itself in a language no one but it can understand.

The Academic Press: The views of "publish or perish" in the academic press are largely just as negative as those found in the popular press. The most vicious attack on the "publish or perish" system, as well as academia as a whole, comes in the form of Charles J. Sykes' book, ProfScam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education. Sykes' book not only attacks the "teaching vs. research" debate, it questions the very validity of academic research. He writes:

> The research culture is founded on an almost religious faith in the search for new knowledge, and professors have a marked tendency to drift toward pietistic unctuousness in describing the importance of their work. In practice, however, a more apt parallel for the professors is with the alchemist, sorcerer and witch doctor who relies on the power of obscure incantations,

> obfuscation, and the infinite capacity of mind-darkening jargon to intimidate and mystify the uninitiated. (103)

Sykes sees the entire research system, with its "publish or perish" mentality, as a huge lie that allows professors to get away with publishing nonsense. Sykes study is important because it challenges the entire foundation upon which the "publish or perish" system is based. In the apparent trend towards changing the system, Sykes book stands as perhaps the most visceral argument.

"Scientific Norms and Research Publication Issues and Professional Ethics," an essay in the Summer 1989 issue of Sociological Inquiry _ by Felix M. Berardo explores the numerous problems surrounding the "publish or perish" system. Berardo touches upon many of the same negative themes as the popular press, but he differs in that he offers a solution to the dilemma. Berardo, a sociologist from the University of Florida, attempts in his essay to create a code of "research publication ethics." While Berardo sees the problems that plague academic publishing in sharp detail, he is also confident that these problems can be overcome.

An article by Carolyn J. Mooney in the 25 March 1992 edition of The Chronicle of Higher Education _, entitled "Syracuse Seeks a Balance Between Teaching and Research," demonstrates how the trend to lash out against "publish or perish" is being dealt with in the academic setting. The article highlights a program at Syracuse designed to reward professors for teaching as well as research (A14). This program, along with programs at Rutgers, University of California and Arizona State University are seen as a response to Boyer's 1990 report. "The Carnegie report. . . is credited with

putting the teaching-versus-research debate on the table nationally" (A15).

The Syracuse program is also being tried at six other universities: Carnegie Mellon, Northwestern, Ohio State University, University of Michigan, University of Massachusetts at Amhearst and California at Berkeley. Mooney's article shows that sentiments again the publish or perish system have clearly had results. Syracuse is leading the way in what could very well be an historic restructuring of the academy. The Syracuse example shows that the "publish or perish" system has strong adversaries in the academic world as well on the "real" one.

Two other interesting articles from the academic press on the subject of "publish or perish" recently appeared in the Journal of Accountancy and the English Journal. In the first article, the question "Do Academic Traditions Undermine Teaching?" is posed. Marvin Strait and Ivan Bull, both CPA's, answer "yes" and "no" respectively (Strait, 69). The article is interesting in that it gives a balanced view of the problem, and shows that the debate about "publish or perish" is lively in a host of academic disciplines.

Karen Jost's article for the English Journal, "Why High-School Writing Teachers Should Not Write," provides a glimpse of how the "publish or perish" debate is subtly being introduced at the high school level. Jost's article criticizes academic professors, who write books on how to teach high school writing, and that urge those teachers to publish. It is interesting that Jost attacks these ideas because they would interfere with teaching, something which she feels isn't allowed to get in the way at the university level.

A survey of literature from the academic and popular press of the past ten years shows that there is a trend to drastically change the "publish or perish" system as it now stands. The question has "how much should the system be changed?" rather than a debate as to whether or not the system should be changed. With this landscape in mind, it is important for theatre scholars to examine what these possible changes could mean for their field.

IMPACT ON THEATRE PEDAGOGY

What does the growing trend against the "publish or perish" system mean for theatre? How do academics in the field feel about the debate? Is Boyer's study reflective of how theatre practitioners responded to the survey? If not, then how did theatre faculty across the nation respond?

It is important for academic theatre practitioners to debate matters of pedagogical importance that directly affect their field. Clearly a significant change in the "publish or perish" system would alter theatre just as much as any other field. It is my hope that this study can act as a catalyst for further debate concerning the "publish or perish" controversy.

It is my hope that this study, and the survey it proposes, can focus the "publish or perish" debate squarely on theatrical questions. Through intense scrutiny of the current system, perhaps theatre departments can suggest alternatives that will more properly apply to the field. It is hoped that the proposed survey below can act as a first step in this process.

SAMPLE SURVEY

The questions asked on this survey are all loosely based on the model that Boyer provides. In addition to the questions listed below, this survey will contain all of the Boyer questions discussed earlier in this study. The only exception is Boyer's question that asks teachers whether or not they agree with the statement "multi disciplinary work is soft and should not be considered scholarship" (Boyer 20). To make this question more specific to the theatre profession, I have replaced it with questions #3 and #4 below.

#1 What type of institution do you teach at?

A) Research
B) Doctoral Granting
C) Comprehensive
D) Liberal Arts
E) Two-Year

#2 What degrees do you hold?

A) BA
B) BFA
C) MA
D) MFA
E) Ph.D.

#3 Do you feel that the performance work (i.e. directing, designing, acting, dramaturgy etc.) you do for the academic stage should be considered as legitimate scholarship?

A) Yes
B) No

#4 Do you feel that performance work done outside of the academic setting (i.e. community theatre, professional work) should be considered as legitimate scholarship?

A) Yes
B) No

#5 Does the current system for promotion and tenure at your university discriminate against theatre faculty whose area of expertise (i.e. Costume Design, Lighting Design, etc.) offers the MFA as a "terminal" degree?

A) Yes
B) No

CONCLUSIONS

The "publish or perish" system, as it currently exists in academia, is under severe assault from factions in both the popular and academic press. Much of this debate has been focused by Ernest Boyer's 1990 report for the Carnegie Foundation, but literature from both the popular and academic press during the past decade has been generally negative in its summary of the system. As critics take aim at the "publish or perish" system because of the emphasis that it shifts from teaching, because of the academic dishonesty that it supposedly causes and because of the "worthless" research that it breeds; it is important that theatre practitioners in academia consider what the current trend means for their field.

It is my hope that theatre, as a field, can focus its attention on this important pedagogical question. Certainly there are unique aspects of the "publish or perish" question that are of particular relevance to theatre scholars. As the "publish or perish" system is changed and/or eradicated in the twenty-first century, it is important for the theatre field to participate in, and hopefully influence this struggle for the soul of higher education.

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